

“Leading With Love”
Message by DD Adams
Providence United Methodist Church
Palm/Passion Sunday
March 20, 2016

The epistle lesson for today is taken from the book of Philippians, chapter 2, verses 5 through 11. I’ll be reading from the *New Revised Standard Version*. “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness.”

“And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

The gospel lesson comes from Luke, chapter 19, verses 28 through 40. “After [Jesus] said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, saying, ‘Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here.

If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ just say this: ‘The Lord needs it.’” So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, ‘Why are you untying the colt?’ They said, ‘The Lord needs it.’”

“Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the

road. As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, saying, ‘Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!’”

“Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, ‘Teacher, order your disciples to stop.’ He answered, ‘I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.’” This is God’s word for God’s people. Thanks be to God.

Let’s pray. Lord Jesus, as we approach Holy Week, we open our hearts and minds. We stand in awe of your presence for all you have done and continue to do. Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Amen.

Peace be with you! As Jesus journeys toward the cross, his enemies are mounting in numbers. Scripture tells us that after Lazarus was raised, many of the Jews were believing in Jesus, and because of this miracle, Jesus was regarded as an outlaw. From the religious men’s point of view, the longer Jesus stayed alive, the longer he would prove their incompetence. So the Jewish chief priests and Pharisees took counsel on how to put Jesus to death. The religious men represent one crowd that was present when Jesus rode into Jerusalem.

Another crowd present that day were those who saw Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead. His royal entrance into Jerusalem was like a circus parade. They saw him as a miracle worker! They spread their garments on the back of a young donkey and on the road in front of Jesus. They rejoiced and praised God for all the great works they saw Jesus do.

For first century Greco-Roman people, this kind of an entrance was familiar. When a conqueror or king would triumph in battle they would process into a city

accompanied by the people. Hymns were sung and proclaimed, and they cried out, “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.”

This parade was a king’s procession, but what they didn’t know was that Jesus wasn’t going to be the kind of king they expected. The people were anticipating Jesus to deliver them from the oppression of the Romans, but if this were the case, Jesus would’ve been riding a horse, an animal of war.

As it was, Jesus was riding on the back of an unriden donkey—an animal of peace. The crowd that day cried out loud hosannas. Some of the Pharisees watching the parade heard about Lazarus being raised from the dead and tried to silence the people. They told Jesus to quiet them, but Jesus said even the stones would cry out if *they didn’t*. This is the beginning of the last week Jesus lived as a man. Jesus rode into Jerusalem that day to die; this is what we’re celebrating. Because of Jesus’ obedience to die on a cross and suffer the death of a criminal through crucifixion—we have eternal life. The passion of Christ is very much a part of Palm Sunday.

On Sunday, Jesus rode down the mountainside of Olivet, on Monday, Jesus overturned the tables in the temple of the money changers. On Tuesday, Jesus predicted the destruction of the Temple. On Wednesday Jesus rested. On Thursday, Jesus washed the disciple’s feet and instituted the Lord’s Supper as Satan entered into the heart of Judas Iscariot.

Later that evening in the Garden of Gethsemane, Judas Iscariot, the chief priest, the temple officers and elders took Jesus away. Early Friday morning the false trials were held and then the crucifixion. All of Jesus’ closest friends deserted him, and on Saturday, Jesus was laid in a tomb, but on Sunday morning he rose from the dead!

The eight days show some real mixed emotions from different people. The religious men wanted to kill Jesus for fear of their positions being discredited. Another crowd present with Pontius Pilate realized Jesus wasn't panning out to be the kind of king *they wanted*. They shouted "Crucify, crucify him!" Jesus had done nothing to deserve death, but the crowd loudly demanded that he be crucified. Looking back over the last eight days you come to the conclusion that really *no one* was on Jesus' side. Almost *all* of them turned against him. Now let's take a look at what the apostle Paul has to say in the letter to the Philippians.

The verses read; address Jesus' humanity and his obedience to die on a cross. In verse 8 Paul writes that Jesus took ". . . the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross."

I don't think we can understand how much Jesus humbled himself when he became human and took the form of a slave. Even if humans were embodied as the lowest creature, it wouldn't be to the degree it was for Christ when he put on flesh to represent us. And when we die, we may die of sickness, disease or old age, but none of us will have to endure the torture of death by crucifixion.

Crucifixion was a shameful death that was reserved for slaves and criminals. Jesus, as a King, died voluntarily and in our place. He was obedient to death solely for our benefit as he obeyed the will of God. Imagine Jesus, who originally was in the form of God and with God, lowered himself, and put on the form of a servant or slave voluntarily. Jesus was perfect God and perfect man. He was fully God and fully man. Yet, Christ humbled himself to the will of God and became obedient to death on a cross.

Jesus expressed an immeasurable amount of love for us when he willingly submitted to death, but it still passes many by. They wanted a different kind of

king, so they deserted him, but God has a different way for those who accept Christ into their hearts.

Religion isn't a quick fix for our problems—it's a spiritual journey. It's not something that relieves our guilt or pacifies our worries or makes us feel like a good person. It's not a band-aide or guarantee that ensures a heaven-bound direction when we die.

God has a different way for us. It's not religion that saves us—its having a relationship with Christ. It's opening up our heart to the one who humbled himself and became obedient unto death *for us*. It's hearing the name of Jesus and bowing our knee, and it's confessing that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Jesus did everything different. He turns the tables on every kind of ritual practice we think makes us holy. When the crowd was screaming words of hate at him he was sorrowful and prayed for them. When they crucified him, he prayed for them and asked his Father to forgive them. Jesus is a King who reigns with love.

An earthly king reigns with violent force, but Jesus reigns with love. His prayer for us is to live with others in love—to receive and accept them. To pray for them and model God's love to them, but first we learn to follow Jesus and receive that same kind of love from God. It's not a love like the world knows. It's not based on how we're treated; it's based on who loves us and empowers us to love; it's unconditional.

The night Jesus was betrayed, he prayed to his Father in the garden and says (Jn 17:26) “. . . the love with which you [God] loved me may be in them, and I in them.” We can't love the way God loves until we love God and receive him into our hearts. We couldn't love at all unless God loved us first. Nothing in this world can be compared to the love of God that lives in your heart. Will you receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness so you might lead in love as

Christ did? To love your family and friends in a way that draws them to God because they want what you have?

Please pray with me. Holy God, help us this day to see more than the parade on Palm Sunday. Help us to see you as one who desires relationship. Move our hearts, and bring us back next Sunday so we might explore what this relationship with you is all about. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.